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OFFICIAL AND NOT SO OFFICIAL ART: A DIALECTIC OF SORTS IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

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I have come to my topic today through trying to reconcile in my own mind several groups of images and think of them in new ways. I think it is important to see images within varying contexts, to try to gain a clearer and richer perception of them. I trust this will add to new interpretations. Most of the work I will be discussing today is that of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes; but what I want to stress is the interplay among kinds of art and modes of art and sorts of images in the second half of the nineteenth-century in France.

Pierre Puvis de Chavannes was commemorated in 1899, the year after his death by a full-length portrait painted above the entrance to the Salon. The Salons were large exhibitions under official auspices of what were designated the best and most acceptable paintings of the year. Surrounded by painted muses Puvis was honored as a painter of soothing Arcadian pastorals, and pictured against such a backdrop, an adaptation of a section of his own mural The Sacred Wood Dear to the Arts and the Muses (Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux muses) of 1884 for the Lyons Museum, one of his many reassuring allegorical paintings for French civic buildings. I show you here a reduced version he painted after the mural (a regular practice with him) (this version is in the Art Institute of Chicago), to give you a clearer idea of it. Here as elsewhere, Puvis stationed his figures at

calm, regular intervals, unperturbed and imperturbable. The pale figures of the muses and personifications of the arts are in a verdant clearing. Characteristic of his mature idiom are the contained, flattened areas of opaque colors of some delicacy, the firm silhouettes and shapes, the even rhythms and restrained sobriety, and the paratactic structure of the whole. The style he developed that he felt proper to the demands of the wall painting was to be of enormous importance to the generation of Post-Impressionist artists.

In his numerous public murals he extolled commonly held virtuous principles (Work, Enthusiasm, Christian Inspiration), national heroes (Sainte Geneviève, Victor Hugo), and ideas (French cultural ties with classical Greek art and literature). He did this usually in terms of such classicizing allegorical images. The officially commissioned and sanctioned public allegorical paintings present themes that everyone it was hoped, would subscribe to; and Puvis came to be hailed by official tastemakers, committees that confer commissions for large, important public buildings. He was sought after as a muralist from the middle of the Second Empire through the first decades of the Third Republic, from the 1860s through 1898, creating major mural programs at the city halls of Poitiers and Paris; the museums of Amiens, Marseilles, Lyons, and Rouen; the Paris Panthéon and the main amphitheater of the new Sorbonne. He accepted official recognition with pride when it was accorded him as is indicated in his 1887 self-portrait at sixty-three, undertaken for the Uffizi's Gallery of self-portraits of famous artists. He pictured himself dressed in a smartly dignified business

suit with some hauteur of pose, the only embellishment in an otherwise nearly monochromatic and singularly neutral canvas the red rosette of the légion d'honneur in his buttonhole. Shortly he was to become a "commandeur"; he was not at all the artist-bohemian.

But during a working career that spanned over fifty years (1848-1898) Puvis created a great variety of work. Much of which is still largely unpublished and relatively little known. And there is another phase of his work altogether, one that is not only very little known and intrinsically interesting, but one that has been thought of as a curious, even an aberrant strain in his oeuvre that somehow might even maliciously belie his own more serious work. Puvis de Chavannes' caricatural drawings are not at all official or reassuring. While many may be readily relished, relatively few have been published or exhibited; when they have been they have been described as contradictions. But they are more than curiosities. While it is often difficult to interpret them and the meaning of many is presently still undecipherable, a significant number provide an important index to the interpretation of Puvis' "Official" paintings, serving to explain much about what he was trying to do not only in specific works but insofar as his choice of themes, his style, his general aesthetic, and the expressive content of his work. A number of caricatures seem personally revealing and are suggestive in ways that also have ramifications in the interpretation of his paintings. To try to reconcile his public and official works with these private works is to see how self-conscious Puvis was about his own production and in differentiating that which was fitting for one and not the other. One

may see how what was officially laudable and lauded in his better known paintings might in his own mind be played off against what personally was viewed with what might be called a jaundiced eye. We shall also have occasion to look at some caricatural drawings and paintings by others in what I think are useful juxtapositions as a further indication of a critical commentary on various aesthetic modes.

Puvis de Chavannes' caricatures were private. (And here I am grouping together what technically must be called caricatural drawings, satirical drawings and grotesques.) During his lifetime he permitted only a very few to be published, and these, rather tame ones, when he was over seventy, in 1895 in Le Rire and La Plume. He did, however, give a number to friends, and those in one collection, that of Mme Philippe Gille, were published in 1906. A few have been written about, but not analyzed, nor brought to bear on the mainstream of his production. Produced over many years these drawings span a wide range of styles from fully developed sheets of several colors and some insistence to quick sketches. In tone they range from witty and light-hearted to crude; he created anti-logical hybrids and opaque and threatening grotesques. The expressive content of some of his caricatural drawings eventually was to affect his more official work.

It may not be surprising that Puvis de Chavannes engaged in caricature. In France the nineteenth century has been called the "Golden Age of Caricature," as the eighteenth century has been so designated in England. Interest in caricature by the mid-nineteenth century may be measured not only by the output of artists dedicated to

it, whether working in a graphic or sculptural medium, artists such as the formidable Honoré Daumier, André Gill, or Paul Gavarni, but also by the increased audience for their work, the astonishing proliferation of periodicals, some short-lived it is true, devoted to or featuring caricature. Interest also may be gauged by the number of those known for other kinds of work who also produced caricature, seeing in it, perhaps, a way of introducing the expressive and the fantastic into art: Victor Hugo, Eugène Delacroix, Alfred de Musset, Viollet-Le-Duc, William Bouguereau, Thomas Couture, Edgar Degas, and Claude Monet were a few of its better known proponents. Interest in caricature may also be seen in the number of contemporary studies of the mode.

Puvis de Chavannes' earliest caricatures parody his own early paintings, and those that were meant to be among his most important to that date. In the 1850s, his first decade of activity, Puvis first turned to mural painting as the most estimable endeavor for a serious artist, bound, he hoped, eventually to bring him recognition. Eugène Delacroix, Thomas Couture, and Théodore Chassériau, whom he most admired (and he had briefly studied with the first two), were each engaged in completing major mural cycles. But the only walls available to Puvis were at the family château Le Brouchy. Thus in 1854-1855, for the large dining room, he completed five main panels and several subsidiary overdoors. (He did not actually paint on the wall but on canvas subsequently affixed in wood panels.) Appropriate to the dining room, the traditional scheme generally has to do with the Seasons here seen as the production of Foodstuffs, recounted in

terms of Biblical stories: I show you here Summer, The Harvest, or Ruth and Boaz; and a study for the culminating fifth panel, The Return of the Prodigal Son, which is devised as the elaborate preparations for a sumptuous feast. Indeed, barely noticeable, at the top of the stairs is the returning prodigal son--probably a wry reference to Puvis himself, the young artist gone to Paris but presently back in the family fold. In these early paintings Puvis relied on others for authoritative compositions. The Ruth and Boaz recall Poussin's harvest scenes of Summer and appropriate at mid-century for a Biblical story is what was then called the "L'Orientalisme" the middle-Eastern trappings of the setting. Puvis had also copied a section of Veronese's Presentation of the Virgin, and in The Return of the Prodigal Son the general setting open to the turquoise sky, the balustrade, the hefty figures, the colorful costumes and the general bustle derive from sixteenth-century Venetian painting, specifically Veronese, though traces of Delacroix, (the colors), Raphael, and even references to Courbet's work may be noted.

In his stiffly outlined caricature of The Return of the Prodigal Son (Puvis' caricatural style was to become much freer shortly), a sign at the upper left identifies the setting as a tavern or inn, "Au veau prodigue," (At the Prodigal Calf's), and indeed the calf's multiple heads on the sign and on the animal being roasted are excessive. The garland held by the woman to the lower left in the mural is replaced by a banner that announces a Salon banquet of 1000 places; Puvis' work, much to his chagrin, was excluded from the Salon after an initial appearance in 1850 and was not to be exhibited there

again before 1859. Part of the streamer reads "Dinners of the Exhibition," and further, "lodging for people and horses." A figure at the base of the steps is polishing chamber pots rather than trays, and all manner of queer persons--breasts exposed, topsy-turvy--are on the terrace where Veronese-like figures had been in the painting. The figure mounting the stairs here carries a foaming bottle of beer, and the prodigal son is now a figure vomiting.

Similar in bawdy tone and harsh style is Puvis' parodying view of The Harvesters or Ruth and Boaz. The figures are now in the environs of a public bathhouse, outside "Les Bains de L'Exposition," "Les Bains ru . . . [ss]es" The Russian baths seem indicated. Once again now, in caricature, the figures are provided a would-be reasonable contemporary context for being turbaned and in leggings: The "L'Orientalisme" of the painting is more logically seen as a bathhouse setting. Reference may be to an actual bathhouse for they proliferated in the 1840s, with Turkish and Russian style baths particularly popular with the rich. Indeed one commentator noted there were baths from in "every country and in every street, so many that there were in Paris almost as many ways and opportunities of washing as getting dirty." "Les Bains de L'Exposition" seems once again a hostile repudiation of the Salon seen as a bathhouse, a place itself in need of cleaning up, or as providing some kind of bath, a place where there are "watered down" works (the expression holds in French and English) that are acceptable. The turbaned Boaz is now "Pur vi-Pacha/ Dégraisseur" "Pur vi" is a play of words on Puvis' name and seems meant as a personal reference; it also has a sexual

connotation. "Pacha" is "Pasha," and a "dégraisseur" removes or cleans off oil or dirt.

Puvis seems to indicate the Salon needs cleaning up and he will do it. Indeed cleaning accessories, sponges, and brushes adorn the tree. Now the timorous Ruth behind Boaz, as if a refugee from Baron Gros' famous Bonaparte Visiting the Plague Victims at Jaffa which he is then also mocking, holds her nose: The Salon, Puvis seems to be saying, smells. The woman harvester to the right holds up her skirts suggestively and wields a sickle. Remember her, she will recur more discreetly, in a later work.

In like manner Puvis also satirized another of his early paintings. Though there are no documents that he submitted his 1857 L'Incendie, The Fire or Village Fireman (today in the Hermitage vaults) to the Salon, its large size (about 6 1/2' x 7'), theme, and derivation indicate he meant it to be important enough to submit. Disaster scenes had a certain currency in the 1850s: they provided an opportunity to combine realism, then in its ascendancy, and an excited emotionalism, a vestige of romanticism, yet proper to the dramatic subject at hand. The Fire said to have been inspired by a scene Puvis witnessed in the Maconnais, dates from the year of two especially terrible fires: one left one hundred persons destitute in the hamlet of Fretterans in Bresse bordering the Maconnais. Fires were a major cataclysm to whole villages when thatched houses were customary and fire fighting equipment was primitive as that pictured in Puvis' painting. Frequent (and well documented), accidental and set deliberately, they were a constant source of anxiety. Moreover, at

least in 1861 it was rumored "that clerical and legitimist bands were setting the fires in retaliation for the Emperor's papal policies," as reported by the historian Eugen Weber; so that disasters, though a frequent and apparently engaging theme at mid-century, in the case of these conflagrations may have had further political meaning.

Again Puvis' composition seems to have been created with two major works of official painting in mind: Thomas Couture's Les Enrôlements des Volontaires de 1792 (The Enrollment of the Volunteers of 1792) of 1848 and Gustave Courbet's Départ des pompiers courant à un incendie (Departure of Fireman Running to a Fire) of 1850-1851.

Puvis' The Fire is like a country relative to Courbet's urban scene of crisis which is firmly fixed as an event of modern life, but the large-scale of that painting (388 x 580 cm.), and the significance of the theme must have impressed him. The general composition and orientation of Puvis' The Fire as that of Couture's Enrollment, which occupied Couture during the months Puvis was a student in his atelier, and which was to have hung in the Assemblée Nationale if only the Second Republic had survived. In the center of both figures push and drag their load. In both a group of figures enter from the left. Indeed the priest in The Fire is at about the same place as the curé in Enrollment. Like Couture, Puvis also uses the device of including figures of varying levels of reality recalling the heroic participation of equally disparate figures rallied to a common cause in such works as Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People.

The expressionist thrust to be seen shortly in Puvis' caricature is notably present in preparatory drawings for the woman

carrying pails in The Fire (on the screen). Her head is thrown back, her mouth open, a strikingly emotional figure in a strained stance, apparently considered for but abjured in the painting, in which the woman is depicted with the effortless bearing more likely to be understood in terms of a transcendent figure, a distant relative to Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People. Her outfit, indeed her bare feet, further suggest her removal in time, place and reality.

Puvis' caricature based on The Fire also refers to Couture's Enrollment and transforms the scene to a scatological one in which the elimination of waste and excrement seems to be central. With an additional figure with arm upraised imported from The Enrollment (as part of his mockery) the central apparatus is neither a cannon nor firefighting equipment but a catch vat, used in plumbing. A figure to the far left now shoulders the cannon barrel of Couture's work and the robust, pail-carrying woman is permitted her emotions. Alongside the tank the figure with a clyster jammed into the figure proceding him is based on another of Couture's striding men. The firefighter's helmets have been replaced with overturned chamber pots, and with a certain crude consistency at least one bare bottom is visible. Fecal material is in the foreground, and figures hold their noses against the stench. On the apparatus being pulled is written, "Pierrot tu dit/ Démange/ Vida . . .[nge] accélérée/nouveau/ procédé déinfectant. The words proclaim (in a free translation) as in an advertisement: "Pierrot says, if it . . .itches, for speedier drainage, a new disinfectant process." Pierrot refers to Puvis whose given name was Pierre and who later inscribed a painting from "Pierrot." The melancholic Commedia

dell'Arte figure Pierrot is almost a commonplace alter ego for artists during these times, from Watteau's Pierrot-like Gilles, through Couture, to Picasso. Puvis' pronouncement is to clean out what needs looking after. Puvis again seems to poke hostile humor at the Salon, shifting the theme of disaster to that of the Salon as a disaster. But in so doing he distances himself from and debases his painting on which the caricature is based and satirizes its conventions. He makes a drollery of something important to him in a way he was later to refer to himself in caricature.

Motifs common to Ruth and Boaz and The Fire indicate they were devised as an ensemble, or executed within a short time of one another: the caricatured Boaz, carries a closed umbrella and the satirized priest, an open one. In both, figures hold their noses; the buildings are similar and a turbaned woman is a small, whimsical presence. Disorder marks The Fire caricature, but restoration and cleanliness is indicated in that of Ruth and Boaz.

All three caricatures form a stylistic unit satirizing Puvis' own early works. Although "serious" art was a source of ridicule for caricaturists from mid-century, it is remarkable that Puvis would critically take to task his own paintings, or use them as a comic vehicle, but that is not simply what he is doing. What he is isolating for criticism is, I think, quite precise. In the nineteenth-century artists with a groaning smorgasborg of styles to choose from, might be very intensely aware of the artificiality or foreignness of certain motifs and traditional styles within their own time, but nevertheless choose to use them. The century has at least

from the 1830s been called one of eclecticism. Allusions to past styles might not only confer a certain cachet on a work and enrich it, but might also be, given the context of the subject, expressive. Besides railing at the Salon which he felt was overly restrictive, in these caricatures Puvis with great detachment recognizes and isolates the authoritative but artificial aesthetic conventions that he had himself adopted in these early undertakings to be, I think, acceptable. That is, the parodies and paintings form a dialectic (I am sorry to say that but it is true, I think), a dynamic interrelationship in which the dissonances of the historicizing or otherwise self-conscious styling of Puvis' paintings obtain a certain logic in the caricatures and therein the modes themselves are questioned and mocked. The caricatures make the aesthetic artifices palpable and serve critically to underscore in a non-discursive way how self-conscious they are. Thus, the opulent Venetian setting of The Return of the Prodigal Son in straight-forward nineteenth-century terms becomes a bustling inn of near pandemonium with queer people where prodigality is literally manifest in the many-headed calf. And the Middle-Eastern setting, the "Orientalisme" adopted as was modish for the Biblical Ruth and Boaz is explained in real nineteenth-century terms as the environs of a Russian bathhouse.

In the 1860s Puvis turned to the classicizing images with which he is often identified. And now again in caricature, he explained and defended his aesthetic position. His allegory Fantasy of 1866-1867 (this version in the Bührle family collection, Zurich) includes a nymph, a youth, and a winged Pegasus. It is typical of a

host of his works of the 1860s. Fantasy epitomizes Puvis' ability to embody a suitably vague antiquity dear to a collective sensibility in lage nineteenth-century France. A reason for Puvis' predilection for such classicizing imagery is forcefully spelled out in the appropriately captioned caricature, "Pégase vomit devant le grec moderne". By "le grec moderne", Puvis may have meant the Greek language, but I think he meant the modern Greek person. That is, the winged horse, standing for the sanctified and marvelous, albeit mythic work of the past, vomits at the sight of the modern Greek, banal modernity. I wish that I could demonstrate that by "le grec moderne," the modern Greek Puvis specifically referred to and was against was Jean Moréas, born Papadiamantopoulos and known as "le grec moderne," for he launched the manifesto of Symbolism in 1886 and Puvis tried, quite rightly to dissociate himself from the Symbolists--but though the resemblance is there, it is not sharp, and as with many the caricatures the date is not sure. One may compare Paul Gauguin's caricatured portrait of Moréas bearing the opposite message from Puvis', in his "Soyez Symboliste" (dated 1891 though I believe it to be 1889). Puvis' caricature also, (and again), represents a polemical position, indicating with great immediacy that he stood on the side of ideal images and classicism. He was for figments of the imagination--the flying white horse--as opposed to modern man as the subject of painting. His caricature serves as a trenchant riposte, even if avant la lettre to Toulouse-Lautrec's famous large painting (5 1/2' x 12') parodying Puvis' mural The Sacred Wood (Pearlman Collection) which Toulouse-Lautrec kept hung in his own studio for many years. In

Toulouse-Lautrec's parody, an important manifesto on proper subject matter for painters (and done, I might say, right after a virtually unknown allegorical painting of his own) the moderns that Toulouse-Lautrec has trooping through the sacred wood, like tourists in a strange land, signal the gap between Parnassus and Paris, indicating that Parnassus is out of place. Notice the muses flying in with a paint tube and Puvis' Melpomène at the far left is replaced by another of his figures, the prodigal son (of 1879). Here, in a detail, you can see Toulouse-Lautrec's self-portrait with that of other identifiable artists including probably Willette and also a Japanese eyeing the flatness of the painting a style coming from Japanese art. Toulouse-Lautrec, of course, felt that contemporary life was the proper concern of the artist. Even the clock on the portico, barely visible here, is an emblem of anachronism.

In 1866 Puvis exhibited his allegorical La Vigilance at the annual Salon, a semi-draped classicizing figure whose stance and pose was often repeated in art of the period. Juls Lefebvre's Truth of 1859 with lamp held aloft, acclaimed at the Salon of that year, and of course Frederic Batholdi's colossus, "Liberty Enlightening the World": (The Statue of Liberty) with her lamp held aloft, constructed in the 70s and 80s are testimony to the continued use of such figures in public and official art. But this kind of figure was also the subject of ridicule. I can not here document the fascinating history of criticism of the allegorical figure--what was thought its preachiness tediousness or inelasticity--a graphic example will have to suffice: Cham (the pseudonym for Comte Amédée de Noé), who subjected many of

the paintings displayed at the Salon exhibitions to his yearly lampoons mocked such an allegorical figure in one of his caricatures satirizing a painting exhibited at the Salon of 1868. The artificiality of the pose was signaled by creating the kind of situation in which a woman holding up a light would be appropriate. Here it is suggested the light is held up so that a man who has inadvertently left his personal effects at her place can retrieve them.

In other caricatural drawings, Cham expressed the idea that allegorical and classicizing images were not keeping up and should be modernized, as we see in this example, "Apollo converts his chariot to get into the swing of Progress" (ca. 1883).

And indeed, Puvis strived to renew the device of the allegorical image. In his Charity of 1893-1894, a large study for which I show you, and the kind of work to which Picasso owes so much, he painted for the Paris City Hall a so-called Parisian Virtue, part of a series on that subject. Giving is promoted as a civic virtue and the poor are ennobled. "Public assistance" was under the jurisdiction of the municipal government, and the figure is suitably secularized and updated. One can see in Puvis' caricature, "Generous hearts be sensitive to a poor blind man, if possible," a similar theme of Giving. In caricatures like this one, the poor may be decried as shiftless beggars, or there may be genuine sympathy, but they seem to call for the special kind of viewing and appreciation that witty or ironic or vituperative social commentary against a third party seems to demand. The official public allegorical personification on the

other hand shows something that everyone should subscribe to; it unifies. Both the public allegorical figure and caricature are forms of condensed imagery that efficiently communicate a social message. Both are concise and offer focus and are meant to be accessible. But whereas the official painting exhorts and beguiles toward morally sanctioned public ideals--Charity-Giving--the caricature ridicules and rebukes. One pulls, the other pushes; the one is a recto to the other's verso.

In view of a certain disaffection with the historico-classicizing allegorical figure in the late nineteenth century it may not be coincidence that caricature thrived generally as a highly public art replacing allegory as a vehicle for tendentious, concise social statements.

But Puvis was aware of a moral disequilibrium of his time from which he wished viewers to find solace. The bucolic and reassuring world of his public allegorical paintings contrasts to what he mocked in his private, acerbic caricatures as the unseemly world of La Vie Parisienne, in which not enough was sacred.

Caricatures like "Le Diner chez le Commandant Jacquot" that I would date about 1867-1870, demonstrate Puvis was a keen observer of everyday life but found much of what he saw disordered, disgraceful, or vulgar. Implicit in his depicition of the domineering "commandant," whose fez suggests experience in the colonies, are what seem to be simple but pretentious adults and ill-mannered but cruelly humiliated children. There may be political meaning with the children made to sup on the floor after their unruly behavior, especially since

one is shown with dark skin. If, however, this is simply a genre scene, a scene of everyday life, then it is clear that Puvis took a derisive view of the domestic scenes that so enamored the contemporary Impressionists and his probing caricatures explain why he produced no genre paintings of modern life.

Tacitly understood in the exaggerated representation of untoward behavior and disorder is the idea of propriety of behavior and order with which the depicted scene is at variance. Although a comparison is not, therefore, necessary to understand the thrust of Puvis' caricature, this detail of his 1873 Summer shows a calmer scene of eating that he decidedly preferred. Also notice the lady with the sickle once again on the right, much comelier here than in the caricature Ruth and Boaz; in view of that caricature, her nobility of bearing here must be seen at some level of interpretation, as ironic.

Puvis' created a number of scathing caricatures of contemporary character types that demonstrate he was a keen observer of everyday life. Among them are withering anti-clerical drawings ridiculing the false piety, pride, material wealth, ineffectiveness, and sanctimoniousness of churchmen. They are viewed as hypocritical, powerless or pretending powerlessness or stupid. The caricatures stand as reproofs of sorts with an underlying normative premise from which criticism is directed. Puvis' caricatures reinforce the meaning of his religious paintings which I cannot really show you today, but in which simple faith, moral solitude and virtue are celebrated but not in conjunction with the institutionalized church, panoply, or ritual. Though Puvis turned his attention to the many character types

gathered together in a thriving urban center; his were the pointed views of the caricaturist. The excessive and degrading kowtowing of functionaries, frumpy disheveled literary ladies, blue stockings, and wily concierges did not escape his incisive, mordant and cynical depictions.

The mordant view expressed in a number of these caricatural drawings extends to others that are of a very personal and revealing nature and bear on his own life and personal interrelationships. These drawings remained in his collection and are today in the collections of collaterial descendents. In them he expressed himself in a way he was reluctant to do or unable to do at least until the late 1870s or 1880s in his paintings. The expressive content of some of these caricatural drawings nevertheless was eventually to make its way into some of his most remarkable easel paintings.

Feelings of isolation, alienation, and helplessness are expressed in several caricatures that seem to allude to his relationship to the Impressionist painter Berthe Morison, her family and circle, and his long-time companion and finally his wife the Rumanian princess Marie Cantacuzène. Puvis met Berthe Morisot in 1868 and she was the recipient of over forty letters, a number of which have been published. The letters attest to amorous fantasies, his reticence and an infatuation which she did not entirely discourage, but Puvis felt her family did.

Puvis was gallant but sometimes timid, and friends, including Degas, made fun of what appears to have been a humorless earnestness in his manner for Berthe Morisot relates he compared Puvis to the

condor in the Jardin des Plantes. There may have been some real animosity between Edouard Manet and Puvis, probably based on jealousy, for both Berthe's mother and Berthe herself describe such incidents. In one letter Puvis characterized as droll a dream he had in which he felt a family mockingly rejected him, and in another he announced there was no remedy for the antipathy he seemed to arouse in a way that others didn't. Certain drawings seem to refer to these or like episodes and seem to reveal Puvis' uncertainty of himself at this personal level despite his characterization of the situation as somehow droll. Psychiatrists have explained humor in these anxious situations as an ego defense, a release of tension through the making light of and belittling the seriousness of the situation. In one caricature reminiscent of Degas' 1865 depiction of Edouard Manet (Berthe's brother-in-law) and his wife playing a piano (Wada Collection, Osaka) and cropped by Manet so it is not certain what was to the right, Puvis includes at the lower right what I think is a self-portrait--forlorn almost Thurberesque, an isolated alien figure trying to be included in the scene of domestic tranquility in much the same way Puvis wished to be accepted within the Morisot family circle. In another caricature the kneeling suitor that might represent Puvis ingenuously declaring his heartfelt feelings as he did in his letters, seems foolish especially as the comely but dominating stern lady in fetching decolleté dress seems waiting for him to finish so she may jab him with the dagger readied in her hand.

Finally in this faint drawing Puvis used the condensed imagery of caricature again for his own self-portrait, now borne as a

helplessly swaddled phallus-shaped body by a figure recognizable as the Princess Marie Cantacuzène. Another drawing of her in which her physiognomy is similar is mounted together with the caricature and dated July 11, 1869, the same years Puvis was corresponding with Berthe Morisot. In Puvis' portrait of Marie Cantacuzène painted fourteen years later, and exhibited at the salon of 1883 to very favorable notices, she is characterized simply and starkly as a woman of a certain age (she was in her sixties), dressed in the dark simple clothes affected by older women in France. The princess often posed for Puvis' paintings (for example the woman in La Charité; in her youth she had also been Théodore Chassériaú's mistress and had also posed for him. The importance of the Princess Cantacuzène to Puvis and the debt he owed her, he said were incalculable. In light of his caricatures we can further ponder what he meant.

The suggestion of power and helplessness embodied in Puvis' caricatural self-portrait is enunciated in even stronger terms in his ominous figure of a death's head twanging the strings of the woman/instrument with trussed legs. This hybrid grotesque of a surprising ferocity, is an example of Puvis' powerfully expressive, disquieting, almost surrealist condensed imagery. The contrapposto stance and general configuration bear resemblance to Jacques Callot's caricatural figures and suggest the lute-playing Metzetin of the Commedia dell'Arte. The motif of women depicted as musical instruments to be played dates back at least to Dutch seventeenth-century paintings and through Picasso. Grotesques have been considered different from caricatures and without humor. Wolfgang

Kayser has written they are mutants and not susceptible to orderly, scientific explanation, but alien and fraught with dread. Puvis' crude, lusty grotesques excite the incorrigible hilarity of recognition that Baudelaire predicts or embarrassment and discomfiture that Ernst Kris and Gombrich explain as a refusal to share in their aggressiveness.

By the end of the 1870s, on the eve of creating some of his most remarkable easel paintings, Puvis stated that having proved himself as an official painter of public works, much was left to be done in the area of expressiveness. As emotionally sober and restrained as they may be, the underlying theme of many of Puvis' mature easel paintings, not meant for public monuments or devised to extol or exhort, is expressive motifs that we have seen in his personal caricatures--of helplessness, solitude and forbearance: The Prodigal Son which he did in several versions in 1879, and whom you may remember from Toulouse-Lautrec's parody, a subject to which he returned once again after so many years, and his famous The Poor Fisherman are the elaboration I think of an outlook set forth in the caricatures.

Puvis de Chavannes' caricatures and indeed that of others are not contradictions, by providing a new context of understanding, they clarify our perception of other works. They may suggest polemical positions and can provide a critical commentary explaining much about views toward official art and its devices and the Salon in the second half of the nineteenth century. Sometimes whimsical and often sardonic, Puvis' caricatural drawings help establish how willfully

subdued and reassuring are the official images for which he is well-known.